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The Committee to Oppose the Deportation of Joseph Johnson  
P.O. Box 8731, North Star Building  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55402

# "THEY HAVE DECLARED ME

# A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY"

AMERICAN BORN JOE JOHNSON'S STORY  
OF HIS PRISON EXPERIENCES AND HIS  
FIGHT AGAINST DEPORTATION

50¢





JOSEPH JOHNSON

Published by

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126

## WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

When Joseph Johnson received a deportation order from the U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in May, 1964, it first seemed a mistake, or at worst, a joke in bad taste. But events proved that the U. S. government was in earnest and seriously intended to revoke his birthright of citizenship and expell him from the country. Mr. Johnson has to fight the deportation order, both in his own interest and to prevent the establishment of a dangerous precedent in the U. S. A. — the enforced banishment of a native citizen from the land of his birth.

But banishment — cruel as it is — is not the worst that can happen. If the deportation order is upheld it is the personal responsibility of the defendant to find a country that will accept him. Joseph Johnson has no place to go and if he cannot gain admittance into another country as an exile from the United States he is to be imprisoned for the rest of his life!

The Committee to Oppose the Deportation of Joseph Johnson was formed by those interested in helping Mr. Johnson win his case and to raise the necessary funds for his defense.

At present Mr. Johnson has exhausted the initial channels of appeal and is appealing the adverse decision to the Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington, D. C. Should this be rejected, he will take his case to the courts, up to the Supreme Court if necessary. The outcome of this case will depend in large measure on the support he receives from individuals and groups who wish to halt the slow and insidious erosion of our constitutional rights.

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dom, the same work that led to my victimization by the authorities.

That's my right as an American and I do not intend to be robbed of it.

For all of these reasons I'm asking you to help in my defense.

January, 1966

## INTRODUCTION

Reading about the case of Joseph Johnson, one comes away with this conclusion: that the United States government is doing everything it can to "unburden" itself of one of our best citizens. It's as if the Immigration Dept. had taken quite literally Pres. Johnson's disastrous ideas about the consensus, and had had decided to do its bit by deporting anyone who dissents. It is a naked use of punitive power, in no way distinguishable from General Hershey's attempt to draft every American who disagrees with him on Vietnam.

That Joseph Johnson, on his release from jail, was paroled to Harry DeBoer, one of the first Smith Act victims, is a reminder to us all that this perversion of governmental power is now being visited upon a second generation of dissenters. Like McCarthyism, conformity and consensus are being institutionalized; and an attempt is clearly being made to make dissent a criminal act punishable by "law." That it is here, in the case of Joseph Johnson, being done under the cover of immigration laws should fool no one.

In fact, I am certain it does not. The government's intent, its cruelty, its cynicism – and its desperation – is so abundantly clear that even those who would be blind must see it.

There is no doubt that in the long run American tradition and American sanity will be reasserted and Joseph Johnson will be vindicated. In the short run – and especially at this time when the war against the Vietnamese people is driving the administration to ever more desperately piratical acts – dissent is still a clear and present danger (for both government and dissenting citizen) and the widest possible support and defense of Joseph Johnson is a vital necessity.



Happily for us all, this comes at a time when the American Left has the renewed (perhaps the altogether *new* strength which is the result of its marvellous diversity. It is an irony which, I suspect, the administration cannot appreciate: it's the war in Vietnam, carried by that other Johnson to ever higher levels of horror, which keeps us united and prevents our diversity from being fragmented and weakening.

The Anarchists used to talk about "propaganda by deed." By its vicious harassment of Joseph Johnson our government can be certain that it will be faced with growing numbers of those unwilling to join LBJ's consensus, and therefore forced to propagandize by acts.

Warren Miller  
February 1, 1966

*Warren Miller is the author of "The Cool World," "Looking for the General," "Ninety Miles From Home," "The Siege of Harlem" and other works.*

first to the Board of Immigration Appeals, and then, if necessary, to the federal courts.

What has come out of the decision and hearings is mostly an example of the Immigration Service's inefficiency and efronterry and its ability to lie when it wants to. This is important, but it isn't too significant where the real issues are concerned. When we appeal the case into the federal courts the real constitutional issues can be aired.

#### **If This Case Is Won**

It is often pointed out that if I win this case it'll be a win for everybody. This will be true in two ways. First, it will strengthen the rights of citizenship. It will strengthen every citizen's position in this area. Then, in a more general sense, all civil liberties are tied together, are part of one fabric. Any victory in a case like mine makes the fabric a little stronger, and any defeat makes it a little weaker.

To be sure, not everybody's civil liberties are immediately or directly endangered by the case brought against me. Such persecution is primarily aimed at those people who are political, who take political action, and particularly those who involve themselves in independent and radical political action. For example, it is pointed out in one of the defense committee brochures that Grace Kelly is an American citizen and is at the same time a reigning monarch of another country. If that isn't involving yourself in the political life of another country I don't know what it is. But there is no harassment of Grace Kelly for that.

To get down to the real political essence, it depends upon what kind of political action you're engaged in. If you're from the working class, and are taking part in its political action as a socialist, you are liable to attack. But if you're from the ruling class, and are taking part in its political action, you are secure. In the political sense then, a victory in this case means that it will be somewhat easier for American workers and students to engage in more political action. If we lose the case, it means that there will be a little less freedom and we will have to work that much harder.

But in addition to these broad questions of civil liberties, I have a big personal stake in the outcome of this fight. I want to stay in this country. It's the country of my birth. And I want to keep on working here for the cause of human free-



Of course, the Immigration Service does have to follow some rules. For instance the defendant has the possibility of cross-examining witnesses. This is one reason why my case has gone on so long. At the first hearing they brought in two border patrolmen to testify when and how I came across the border. Although this had taken place six years before, the first border patrolman said he could remember every detail. He could remember exactly when I came over, when I was arrested, how long I was questioned, and so on.

When I returned to the United States I went to the bus station in Buffalo and bought a ticket to Chippewa Falls, where my draft board was. That's where I intended to turn myself in. But the border patrol picked me up before I boarded the bus. They questioned me for some time, took a couple of statements from me, and then turned me over to the FBI. I claim that I was questioned for over eight hours and that I wasn't given access to an attorney during that time. But this border patrolman at the hearing testified that they had questioned me for only ten or fifteen minutes. Now in talking at the hearing he mentioned a document that he wrote on the case—a written form that he had filled out. So we immediately asked to see that form. Once it was mentioned in the testimony, we had the right to see it. On that form we found there was a different time listed than what he had testified. We pointed this out and he changed his story completely and came up with a new one. Then they brought the second border patrolman in, and he came up with a third story. So the prosecution ended up with three different stories about when and how I came back into the United States.

They've had four hearings on this and still haven't really established legally the time that I came back into the United States. At one hearing they brought in the head man from the Buffalo Border Patrol office. He was the official who had to sign all the documents, get them started, and so on. But he didn't know anything. He didn't even know if he had been working at that time. At the last hearing, in October 1965, they gave up trying to straighten out the matter. They just accepted the time originally stated and overruled the defense objections out of hand.

So the decision has now been handed down, and I have been ordered deported from the United States. We expected this decision at this stage of the case and are appealing it,

## A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

My name is Joseph Johnson. I'd like to tell you my story. I'm in an unusual and frightening situation. I'm a native-born American, but legally I'm a man without a country. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service has declared me "stateless" and ordered my deportation from the United States. I'm subject to arrest and detention at any time.

I'm one of the first "stateless" persons in American history, and I'm one of the first native-born Americans, holding citizenship in no other country, to be threatened with deportation.

This is very serious. How did it come about?

I'm a socialist, and I've run for public office in Minneapolis as a socialist candidate. In fact I'm the Socialist Workers Party's organizer in the Twin Cities. I'm a political person holding minority political views. But this doesn't entirely explain my situation. Nor have I committed any serious crime. So what did I do? This is my story.

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, at St. Joseph's Hospital, on November 7, 1930. (This, incidentally, is one of the few things that the U. S. Immigration Service and I agree on.) My family lived in Chicago for a short time, but soon left to go back to Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, where they had originally come from. I grew up and went to high school in Chippewa Falls.

Chippewa Falls is a small town of about 10,000 people. Its main industry is a woolen mill, and its second industry is a fresh water bottling plant. But other than that, there are really no jobs in Chippewa Falls. When a young man gets to be 19 or 20 years old he has to leave town to find work. He either has to do that or go to the university or go into the armed forces. As a matter of fact, most young men of that age join the army.



But when I got to be about 20 my thoughts were different. Or at least I thought they were. I had some serious doubts about the reality of the American dream. And since I'd never met anyone else who had these doubts, I thought that no one had ever thought this way before.

That was the 1950's--time of McCarthyism. There was a witch hunt going on against communism and freedom of speech in general. I didn't know much about it then, but I thought that it was wrong. I had no political understanding of McCarthyism and couldn't have given a political analysis of it to save my life.

But when McCarthy started talking, I knew he was wrong. He was witch-hunting around the University of Wisconsin and other colleges in Wisconsin, talking about all the communists there. But I had been to college in Wisconsin and I'd never met a communist in my life. I'd never met a socialist in my life. As a matter of fact, I was considered a bit radical in high school because I was a Democrat. I had no understanding of that kind of politics either, but since my folks voted for the Democratic Party I generally took that position too.

The Korean War was also going on at that time. I had differences with that too. I wasn't really opposed to it in the same way that many people are now opposed to the Vietnam War. I just didn't think it was right. I didn't know why it wasn't right, but I did know that we had gone across the world to interfere in someone else's problem. Maybe we were right and maybe we were wrong, but it didn't seem right for me, and I didn't see any reason to be greatly patriotic about it. I didn't see that it was a great thing to do.

I also had some "strange" thoughts about racial discrimination. Chippewa Falls has no Negroes. As a matter of fact I never saw any Negroes living in that whole area of Wisconsin. But that doesn't mean that there wasn't any racial discrimination. There was, but it was Northern style and it was different. For instance, I worked during the summers in a motel. It was a very small, cheap motel, but during the summers it was busy. Well, some of you who are Negroes or who have worked in civil rights have experienced discrimination. You have run into people in motels or restaurants who have refused to serve you.

I was one of those people. Part of my job was to refuse cabins to Negroes who were passing through. Negroes couldn't sleep in Chippewa Falls. No Negro had ever stayed at a motel in Chippewa Falls or that area. Now I had to do this job, and I did it, but that doesn't mean it didn't have an effect

My case is virtually unprecedented. It's only the second case in American history where a person who holds citizenship only in this country is in danger of expulsion. It's quite possible for some people to have dual citizenship, that is to have been born in Mexico or some other place and also hold United States citizenship. This type of case has come up before. But I hold citizenship in no other country. I never got Canadian citizenship at all. The Immigration Service deportation order says that I'm to be deported to Canada, but there's no indication whatsoever that Canada would even take me.

In the one other case similar to mine, a native-born American was charged with becoming stateless by having served in a foreign army. But for some reason only eight justices of the Supreme Court heard that case and they split four to four. There was no decision on the law itself in that instance. Now we think that with my case the constitutionality of the vicious McCarran Act itself can be challenged.

A large number of civil libertarians, particularly in the Midwest and in Minnesota, have become quite aroused about this. The Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, a national organization, is handling the legal appeal. The ECLC considers it an important test case and is providing the services of their eminent general counsel, Leonard Boudin, as the constitutional attorney. Locally, we have Douglas Hall, who's very well known in Minneapolis as a trade-union attorney and a civil libertarian. He's taking the case because he too feels strongly that it involves certain basic civil liberties that must be defended.

To date (January 1966) the case has been fought out in the hearing stage within the Immigration Service. It was out of that that the deportation decision was issued. Immigration Service hearings operate a little differently than the courts. At them, you are considered guilty until you prove yourself innocent. In fact, you have to prove to their satisfaction that you are innocent of charges they brought against you. I had to prove that I'm not a stateless person and therefore not subject to deportation.

That's a very difficult thing to do. An ordinary Immigration Service hearing is held in a small room. The Immigration Service hearing officer presides. He's paid by them. On the other side is the Immigration Service counsel. He's paid by them too. And on the third side sits the defendant. He presents his case, and they present their case and then the Immigration Service appointee judges the case. He's the judge and jury at the same time.



more strange and unusual. If I'm ordered deported, it's not up to the government to deport me; I have to do it myself. I'm given six months to do it and if I can't do it within six months then I've committed a felony and am subject to ten years in prison. And after I get out, I'm given another six months to deport myself. If I don't do it, then I've committed another felony and the whole thing repeats itself. This could go on for the rest of my life.

Another issue is that of double jeopardy, which is forbidden by the Constitution. From a legal point of view my case isn't precisely one of double jeopardy, but it is certainly something very much like it. On the one hand I served two years for draft evasion, a sentence that only a citizen need serve; and on the other hand I'm declared "stateless" and threatened with deportation.

### Can't Have It Both Ways

Now if you're an alien and you're given a draft notice, you have a choice of serving in the army, leaving the country, or going to jail. You have those three choices. But if you're an American citizen you have only two choices: either serving in the army or going to jail. I was given only one—that of going to jail. I said I was willing to serve in the army, but the army said it didn't want me because of my politics. So I was not treated as an alien, I was treated as an American citizen and sentenced to prison. Yet at the same time they declare that I'm not an American citizen, that I'm a stateless person. Well, as a number of people have pointed out, they can't have it both ways.

The third constitutional aspect and the most important one is that of the basic meaning of citizenship. Prior to 1900 there were no laws on the books which could deprive an American of his citizenship for any reason whatsoever. But since that time they've been chipping away at the right of citizenship. The McCarran Act was the biggest chip. It set up all sorts of ways an American can lose his citizenship. A couple of these have already been declared unconstitutional. But the law itself still hasn't been declared unconstitutional. This is one thing we are trying to accomplish through my case.

In fact, this is perhaps the most important aspect of the whole case. As I mentioned before, citizenship is the right basic to all other rights. Without it you have nothing. And it's the contention of the defense that no crime whatsoever should cause loss of citizenship.

on me. I considered it quite wrong. Again, I knew nothing of the history of the Negro struggle, nothing of the background. I'd read a couple of liberal novels and I'd read a couple of liberal sociological texts on the subject, but I didn't really have any understanding of the problem. However I did consider discrimination wrong, and my job made me carry out this wrong.

So all these things led me to the conclusion that there was something wrong with the United States; that it wasn't the greatest country in the world. I decided that I was going to leave the United States.

If it had been a period like today, marked by the existence of the anti-war and Freedom Now movements, I might well have got involved in those movements and never even thought about leaving the U. S. But, remember, what I'm talking about was back in the period of McCarthyism. There was little organized protest—and what there was of it never reached small towns like Chippewa Falls.

So I didn't even know then that my thoughts were political thoughts. This was one of the problems of coming from a small town. I didn't know that other people thought politically. I didn't know that anyone else had ever thought the way I did. Today, of course, I find that there are many people who think there are things wrong with the United States and that other countries have gotten rid of these evils.

So I left the United States and went to Canada. This, too, I thought was unusual, but I've since found out that migration between the U. S. and Canada used to be very common. Tens of thousands of people used to follow the harvests and the logging camps. In their organizing work the Industrial Workers of the World or Wobblies used to cross the Canadian border as easily as they did the state borders. They considered this all one world, and they didn't pay much attention to borders. I chose Canada myself because it's just north of Wisconsin. It's easy to get there. A bus ticket is only \$14 or \$15 and there are no visas or passports required.

I first went to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and got a job skinning logs. Then I moved around Canada for a while and ended up in Toronto, Ontario. In the meantime I saw a lot of the north, logging and that sort of thing. It was romantic and interesting but it was mainly hard work.

I would say that my political education really started in Toronto. I got a job in General Steelwares, a very unusual plant. It was a big steel-fabricating plant with around 1,500 workers. It was different from plants in the United States. Here,



our factories are on a very high industrial plane, but most of the workers are on a low plane politically. They have forgotten the situations and lessons of the 1930's. In Canada, the situation is often just the opposite. The industrial organization is on a low plane and the political organization is on a much higher plane.

This was the situation in General Steelwares. As a factory it was a washout. For example, one of the things we made was milk cans. To make the body of the can we'd take a flat sheet of steel and roll it into a loop. We'd do this by putting the steel through a wringer that was made just like an old farm washing machine. It didn't even have an electric motor. Somebody would have to turn it by hand.

As another example of the backwardness of this factory, we had to move a big gear—about ten feet tall. It weighed many tons. We'd move it exactly the way the Egyptians moved stone blocks for their pyramids. We'd take boards and ropes and by pushing and pulling we'd move the gear a little bit. Then we'd take the boards out and rearrange them and we'd move the gear a little farther.

### Active in Union

While that plant was on a low technological plane, it was on a very high plane politically. Every worker in that shop knew the score. He knew he was a worker and he knew the boss was a boss. And he knew that his interests weren't the same as the boss's. Nearly every worker I knew in that shop considered himself either a socialist, an anarchist or a labor party man. Everyone was for working-class politics, for independent political action of one sort or another. And a lot of them understood socialist theory very well. I got a lot of education there. I moved around in the plant. I talked to a lot of the people there and became active in the union.

The union was Local 1111 of the United Steelworkers of America. It was a very militant union, and I was elected from it to the Central Labor Union. I was also a delegate to the labor party, now called the New Democratic Party. The union itself had affiliated to this political party, which was a big political step.

I met many socialists there, including some who considered themselves revolutionists. I was on the union's Political Action Committee and a majority of the members of that committee were socialists. I became a socialist while working in this plant in Toronto, Canada.

These officials base their claim that I'm a stateless person, subject to deportation, on the ground that I was politically active in Canada. The 1952 McCarran Immigration Act says that anyone who votes or takes part in a foreign election as a candidate loses his citizenship. And they say that I did these two things.

What do such charges really involve? What is their real importance? There are two crucial aspects seen by people concerned with the case and working on the defense committee. Both go back to the basis of our civil liberties in the United States. The first aspect involves the legal and constitutional guarantees of the Bill of Rights. The second aspect is political. It involves the working class and those taking working-class independent political action. I'll present the political aspect first because that is my point of view.

### Political Harassment

I think that this case is mainly an act of harassment against the Socialist Workers Party and against our political ideas. It's one way of getting at us, of attacking us without having to attack our ideas directly. And it's a way of diverting some of our energy. It's also a way of hurting not just us, but all others who believe in independent political action, and it's a way of scaring others who may be interested in independent political action. This is one side of the case.

The other and broader aspect is of concern to most of the people interested in my case. That is the constitutional aspect. One part of this pertains to the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits strange and unusual punishments. This clause was put into the Bill of Rights because, prior to it, governments had dreadful ways of punishing people. They would cut off hands and arms; they would brand people; they would transport them to other countries or colonies. The founders of our government didn't want any more of this, so they prohibited it by the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution.

The defense has pointed out that this case is certainly one of strange and unusual punishment. To be declared "stateless" is certainly strange and unusual. It is also terrifying. You become sort of a null person. You don't exist in a legal status. You have no legal rights that any country must respect. In addition, deportation to some unnamed and unknown country that you've never been to and know nothing about is certainly very strange and very unusual as well.

The McCarran Act has further wrinkles that make it even



When I got out of prison I was on parole for about 12 months. And the minute I got off parole I joined the Socialist Workers Party in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I was paroled to a fellow who had also served time in prison. He had been one of the very first Smith Act victims, back in 1941. So it was an easy parole and I did well.

I joined the SWP in Minneapolis for a number of reasons. One was that I was already a socialist and believed in the same program as the SWP. The other reason was that in Minneapolis if you want to be a socialist you've got to be in the Socialist Workers Party. There's nothing else. It's the only thing there. And it's a pretty good branch with quite a tradition and a lot of fine people. So I joined it and became very active in the party and was later elected to be branch organizer. I acted as its public spokesman and ran twice as its candidate for public office.

This was a very exciting period, just after the Cuban Revolution. New people were coming into the party. We were growing and expanding. I was very active. I became well known in the whole Minneapolis area. I say this because I believe it has something to do with my case.

In May, 1964, I got a registered letter from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Its first point was that I was Joseph Johnson and was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 7, 1930. That was fine. But then it got bad. It informed me that I had been declared a "stateless" person. The third point made this clear. I was ordered to appear at a hearing to show cause why I shouldn't be deported to some unnamed country.

This was quite a shock to me. I'd assumed that if there was any trouble with the Immigration Service it would have been brought up when I was sentenced for draft evasion, five years before. Also, I knew from my prison experience that before you get out of prison a form is sent to every section of the federal government and the state you're going to. It tells them that prisoner number so and so is going to be released from prison, so if you want him for anything come down and get him when he gets out. This has happened often, and it's something every prisoner is worried about. No matter what you're in prison for, you're always worried that somebody wants you for something else and that they'll pick you up as you go out.

However, the Immigration Service said nothing to me while I was in prison and nothing when I got out. Likewise, nothing happened when I got off parole. Not until four years later, in 1964, did I get this letter.

Everything was going along quite well at this time. It was an exciting place to be and an exciting life. There was political action going on. There was working-class action going on. We were developing toward a strike.

Then, in the latter part of 1958, two RCMP agents came to see me. Now, the RCMP is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. But it's not royal, it's not mounted, and it's not a police. It's like our FBI except that it has a little more power. It has the power of arrest, and in certain provinces of Canada it acts as the police force. The two RCMP agents were very friendly. I offered them tea. We chatted a while, and then they told me that I was wanted by the FBI in the United States on the charge of draft evasion. I hadn't notified my local draft board where I was, and my draft number had come up. So, they said, I had violated certain U.S. draft laws. Now the RCMP didn't arrest me or anything like that. They just told me about this and then went away.

But this presented me with a problem. I was wanted in the United States for a serious offense, and I wanted to clear it up.

I had also developed politically since I left the United States. I now understood, for example, that Canada wasn't really much different from the United States. It had the same system as the United States. And it had most of the same problems.

While there was no discrimination on the basis of color or race, there was discrimination on the basis of how long a person had been in Canada. Recent immigrants were called "DP's," that is, displaced persons. Actually they were nothing of the sort. They were just immigrants. So those people who didn't speak perfect English or who looked like they were from one of the Eastern European countries got the worst jobs, couldn't eat in certain restaurants—that sort of thing. Now this was nowhere near as bad as race discrimination in the United States but it stemmed from the same thing, and it was designed for the same purpose. Those who owned and ruled the social and economic system were able to divide the workers on this basis.

Likewise, with respect to war. It was true that Canada hadn't gone off fighting in Korea like we had, but on a world scale Canada played the role of America's junior partner. The Canadian government usually did everything the United States did. As a matter of fact, it often played an even more insidious role. It played the role of the small nation, the peacemaker; but when the chips were down it always came to the side of Washington. It always did what the U.S. asked it to do or forced it to do. And since 90 percent of Canada's resources



are owned by the big corporations in the United States, I understood that there was no difference in that respect either. In other words, I understood that I hadn't changed anything by running away, by leaving the United States. I had moved from one nation to another and I was in exactly the same situation as before.

### Return to U. S.

So I decided to come back to the United States and give myself up to my local draft board. This I tried to do. But it wasn't as easy as I thought. I was arrested almost as soon as I crossed the border, and I spent the next 90 days being "jailed" by the FBI back to Wisconsin. I spent most of that time in county jails. As a matter of fact, I got a sort of monotage view of county jails all the way from Buffalo, New York, to Madison, Wisconsin. They were quite interesting and quite different. Some were ultra-modern and had super facilities. Others were out of the middle ages. Terre Haute, Indiana, was a very bad place, particularly for the food. All they gave us was tomatoes, bread and black coffee.

When I finally got to Madison, Wisconsin, I was tried as a draft evader, found guilty, and sentenced to two years in Springfield Federal Penitentiary in Missouri.

A number of people have asked me to say something about Springfield so I'll tell a little about it. I entered prison as a complete "fish." "Fish" is an expression the cons use for a new prisoner. And I was really a new "fish" because I didn't know what prison was going to be like at all.

My ideas of prison life had come from the movies. I had seen the George Raft and Humphrey Bogart movies, where the cons talked out of the sides of their mouths and where they were always planning break-outs and that sort of thing. That's where I got my ideas of prison life, and that's what I thought it was going to be like. Of course, I knew this wasn't exactly the way it would be, but since the movies were my only source of information, I thought it would be something along that line. As a matter of fact, the first person I met confirmed this idea. He did talk out of the side of his mouth, but it turned out he was a very unusual fellow and was the only guy there who did. So, generally, I found prison quite different from what I had expected.

Springfield was an unusual prison. It's where prisoners with serious medical problems were brought. It's also where all the political prisoners were brought. Of course, we aren't supposed

touch with reality. He said that he was a materialist and saw the world as it was, even though it might be a very bad world.

The third point was that he knew which side he was on. He didn't put it as a socialist would, but he said that the world was made up of two groups, the screws and the cons. You've got to decide which group you're going to be for. He was for the cons. He took that side very early and he kept it. He never finked on anybody. He always did whatever he could to help his fellow prisoners, and he always did whatever he could to hurt the screws and the prison bureaucracy. He hated them. That helped him to stay sane. He knew which side he was on. He was on the side of his fellow prisoners.

His fourth point was that he had a defense committee. Because of his work in science and his work in bird pathology, he attracted the interest of other people in that field and they developed a defense committee for him. It became very large and it kept him in contact with the outside world. He knew that he wasn't all by himself. He knew that he had contact, and that kept him alive and in relationship with the rest of the world.

These were the four factors that kept Stroud sane. They had an effect on me. They helped make me more of a socialist. I divided the world into two groups, too. I didn't call them screws and cons, but oppressors and the oppressed, bosses and the workers.

I worked in the prison library. In fact, I was made head librarian. I liked this because I liked books and liked to read. In Chippewa Falls we'd had a Carnegie Library, just a small one, but I spent a lot of time there and learned a lot.

My post made it possible for me to work with my socialist ideas. I organized a small socialist study club, about six or eight people. We'd meet regularly and discuss socialist ideas and the socialist program. Of course we couldn't do much in the way of organizing, but many of the prisoners were interested in socialism, and this gave us something to work with.

We did have one project that was rather interesting. The prison library had a number of works on the social sciences and some anthologies which included writings of Marx and Engels. It struck us that it might be good to make up a sort of collected works of Marx and Engels out of the prison library. So we did this. We had some excellent bookbinders working in the library, and we published a two-volume edition of our anthology. We even put one in the library itself, classified it, and put it on the shelves.



leges. As he put it, he wasn't actually very interested in religion but he wanted to get letters in and out and organize people, and this was one good way of doing it. So he was sticking to it.

#### "Birdman of Alcatraz"

Another person I met in prison was Robert Stroud, better known as the "Birdman of Alcatraz." As I said before, the worst thing about our prison system is the extremely long sentences. Stroud had done 42 years in solitary confinement, and he'd done a total of 57 years in all. He'd killed a man in 1907 in a bar duel and later killed a guard in Leavenworth. Because of this, he was sentenced to death. The sentence was commuted by President Wilson. Then the prison bureaucracy gave him another sentence of its own. Because he had killed a guard, the prison bureaucracy gave him an additional sentence of life in solitary confinement. They were able to keep him there for 42 years, until he was about 76 years old.

A lot of people have talked about this man and, if you've seen the movie or read the book about him, you know quite a bit about his work in science and bird pathology and so on. However, I must admit that this was not what interested me most. What interested me was how he remained a sane, capable, creative person while going through 42 years in solitary confinement. This must certainly have seemed to him like his whole lifetime.

I wanted to know this, so I asked him how he did it. We both worked in the prison library and had a lot of time to talk things over. He presented four points on how he remained sane that are not in the movie or in the book, so I'll give them briefly here.

His first point was that he got interested in science. He got interested not just in bird pathology, but in chemistry, physics, biology—all the sciences—and also in languages. He knew about seven different languages.

The second point may come to you as a surprise. He said that he was an atheist, a materialist, and that was one reason why he'd been able to remain sane. He said that he'd seen too many people in prison try to pray their way out and get more and more involved in religion. He said that it's a crutch, a crutch that you keep leaning on more and more, and as things get worse you lean on it heavier and heavier, and finally you like the other world better than the one you're in. You lose

to have any political prisoners in the United States—at least that's what they told us in school. But if we did have them, they'd have been sent to Springfield.

In fact, we do have political prisoners in the United States. There were a couple of hundred people in Springfield whom I would certainly call political prisoners. Also in Springfield were people who had gone stir crazy in other prisons and prisoners whom the authorities were sensitive about in other ways.

There are a number of prison systems in the U.S. There are the county systems, the work-farm systems, the city systems, state systems, and the federal prison system. Of all of them, the federal system is the best. At least, the physical situation is the best. And of the federal prisons, Springfield is one of the best. So when I talk about Springfield, I'm not talking about the worst system. I'm not talking about some Florida chain gang. I'm not talking about the Terre Haute county jail. I'm talking about the very best prisons in the United States.

The real problem in the best prisons in the U.S. is not the physical situation. Generally the food is good—it's a little starchy, but it's good food. The clothing is very warm and serviceable and very clean. And the quarters are certainly very secure and very tight!

The real problem in the federal prison system and in our whole prison system comes from the extremely long sentences. That is the tragic and terrible aspect of our prison system. I met people with 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40, 50-year sentences, and some with life and super-life sentences. And that's so destroying. It destroys a person physically, mentally, and in every other way. I saw guys in Springfield who had gone stir crazy in Alcatraz or other prisons like it. They had become vegetables. They had been destroyed. And then they had been sent to Springfield.

I saw these people in the exercise yards. They'd walk around like moving vegetables. They'd be muttering to themselves, generally keeping their eyes down. You couldn't get any reaction out of them. They weren't for anything or against anything. They were dead as human beings. That's what would happen to people after 15 or 20 years in prison with no hope of getting out. It just destroyed them.

The first thing that struck me about the prison system was the prisoners themselves—who they were and where they came from. If you read sociology textbooks, they give you the IQ level and tell you all about the sociological background of these people. But they don't really tell you who they are. Well,



I've lived with workers all my life, and the people I saw in Springfield were workers. There was no middle class there. There was no upper class there. There were only workers. Ninety-nine percent of the people in our prisons are workers. And there are very few professional criminals in prison. By this I mean that there are very few people in prison who regard crime as their livelihood or profession, and who regard prison as one of the risks of their job.

On the other hand, most of those in prison are people who stole something on the outside and got caught. They're really truck drivers or workers of one kind or another, and what they want to do when they get out is to get a job and go back to work. That doesn't mean that they'll ever be able to do so. A person who has to carry around that cross called "ex-con" may never get another job. And so he may steal something again and go back to prison. But the point is that his whole intention is to get a job and work. Such people are the big majority of those in prison. They're workers.

More than that, they're a special class, a certain grouping among the workers. They're the most exploited of the workers. The big majority of the people in prison are Negro, Mexican, Puerto Rican or Indian. And I'm not speaking now of the South; I'm speaking of those in federal prisons where you had to violate a federal law in order to be sent. So by and large it's members of minority groups who are in prison.

This led to a very interesting situation in Springfield, one that is worth telling about. The Black Muslims in Springfield were very well organized, and since the majority of the prisoners were Negro or Mexican or Indian, the Muslims played an important role.

One aspect of all prison life is the fact that the prisoners control a large part of the prison. They don't control entering and leaving, but they do control almost everything else. They decide where you're going to bunk and what job you're going to get and so on. The guards don't like to admit this, but it's true. It's caused by the fact that most guards are lazy and want to get along with the prisoners. So the prisoners can get some rights in the process, especially if they're organized. And the most organized group in Springfield was the Muslims. So they ran the prison or, at least, that part of it I was in.

I'd like to say at this point that there has been a lot of talk about how the Muslims are racists in reverse, that if they ever got power the white man would be dirt and he'd be stepped on.

That was not the case in Springfield. The Muslims, so far as I could tell, were extremely fair to everyone. They were certainly very fair to me. They used a seniority system based on how long you'd been in prison and how long you had to stay. So the old timers got the best bunks and the best jobs.

#### **Black Muslim Prisoners**

I had pretty good relations with the Muslims myself. Let me tell you about one guy I knew. I'd been in prison only about two weeks and had just got out of the "tank," the isolation cell. A guy was showing me around the prison. We were walking along and he said, "Well, here's a guy coming down the hall that you've got to worry about. You've got to stay away from him. He's the head of the Muslims here and he's pretty rough." So this guy comes down the hall. He's a big fellow, around six-two and very well built. He had no shirt on and he had a ring in his ear and his hair was shaved. He looked like a bad customer.

Then out in the prison yard a couple of days later a number of the guys were practicing weight lifting. I saw this fellow there, and learned that he was the top weight lifter in prison. I watched him for a while and noted that he had a unique way of doing it. He'd lift up the bar and, just before making the final push, he'd yell "Khrushchev!"

I got to know him pretty well, and I found that like most myths, the myth about him was false. He was extremely intelligent and had studied his way up through the second year in college. In fact, he'd gone through high school and two years in college by taking correspondence courses in prison. And he wasn't really a Stalinist or a Khrushchevist or anything like that. His position was: "An enemy of my enemy is my friend. And the thing that gets the screws the maddest is when I yell 'Khrushchev.' So that's why I yell it."

He was very interested in politics and wanted to learn about socialism although he didn't know much about it at that time. He was doing 25 years, and he'd already been in quite a while. He had been a soldier and had shot a couple of people in the South.

So he turned out to be quite a wonderful fellow, and we got along well together. As a matter of fact he gave me a Muslim name. I wasn't a Muslim, but he gave me the name so I'd be able to write him after I got out. He was the spiritual head of the Muslims there, so he had a few extra letter-writing privi-